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Ellington, MO
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
Legislative Hearing on HR 4029
June 10, 2014

One half century of management by neglect. Fifty years of lost cultural and economic opportunity in a region ripe with both and certainly in great need of the latter. From the Park's almost immediate demolition of the Lodge at Round Springs which destroyed both an iconic landmark and a thriving business to the more recently announced closing of the Big Spring Lodge and Cabins for a proposed minimum of three years beginning at the end of this summer. These are just a few of the reasons why the residents in the region I live in applaud Representative Smith for the proposal of HR4029.

I am Christy Roberts, President of the Ellington Chamber of Commerce and business owner in the region. I have witnessed firsthand much of this neglect in the past several decades—trash dumps created on the very sites that were once tourist attractions, access denied to family graveyards as well as gravel bars, timber allowed to rot and waste because of administrative inaction. My family and friends, many of which are business people and all of whom grew up for generations calling Current River home, have seen it all. I am honored to speak on behalf of the proposal to return these parks and riverway to the state of Missouri; and I am saddened by its necessity.

Much like the recent debacle in the VA, what they have on paper and what is actually taking place are far from in agreement. The ONSR can produce records of federally supported river clean-ups, as the present General Management Plan calls for—yet no one working at the canoe rentals or floating the river has seen such an effort for years. Organizations such as Missouri Stream Teams and the Ozark Heritage Project are conducting the clean-ups, along with the local boaters and conservation minded tourists. NPS personnel are no-where to be found.

The ONSR will also allow you to believe that the historical traditions of the local people are of great importance; however their actions speak quite loud when they cancel local festivals created to highlight a way of life of days gone by. This was prevalent when the Haunting of the Hills, a local favorite October event and the Ozark Riverway Heritage Days were cancelled in 2013. Both of these events highlighted important historical demonstrations such as Lye Soap Making, Rope Making, Quilting, Dutch Oven Cooking, Ozark Story Telling, I could go on. Thanks to a local organization, the Ozark Heritage Project, which in part was created just to re-establish these events and make sure the traditions of days gone by does not disappear, the above events will continue with very little assistance by the ONSR and without any funding.

The ONSR promised to be good stewards of the Missouri lands granted them and as Missourians we doubt that promise and offer the following proof:

- 1) Many cemeteries, graveyards and gravesites are now closed and inaccessible to the general public, they are overgrown, un-cared for and access is denied.
- 2) Roads deemed "illegal" are closed or are proposed to be closed. This committee should be made aware that there are no "illegal" roads located in the ONSR, all roads, however remote went

somewhere at one point in history, of which may have been a church, school, cemetery or settler's homestead. It is necessary for locals and visitors to be allowed to experience these locations.

- 3) Historic structures destroyed, allowed to deteriorate, losing forever the historic value to the area and former residents.
- 4) River access closed or proposed closures; river accesses are natural and nearly all accesses are created by the natural occurrences of the rise and fall of the river.
- 5) Boat restrictions applied; Secretary Udall, the first director of the ONSR realized the necessity to have the words recreation included in the original legislation and intended the main reasons for creation of the park to each have equal value; Conservation, preservation and recreation for all. The words "for all" do not limit use of a boat to only canoes, kayaks and rafts. The intention of the park was for all to enjoy. No one group should be singled out for exclusion.
- 6) Primitive camp site closures and proposed closures; primitive camping is a favorite past time of visitors and is a local and regional resident tradition. Campers at these sites are afforded no services for these camping locales even though they are required to pay a fee. Canoeists and guests who arrive by water are welcome to these same locations without having to pay a camp fee. I believe this to be an unjust discrimination to visitors who drive in while the NPS shows preference to preferred groups who float in.
- 7) Resistance to economic growth in the poorest counties in the state. It is integral to the economy of the area that access is kept for the canoe outfitters, horse riders and outboard motor visitors to enjoy in unity. The combined experiences of these groups should be enhanced and improved, not subjected to yet further restrictions and limitations.

My husband and his brothers are a 4th generation family who still visit and utilize the river on a weekly basis. Their grandfather Frank Roberts and great-grandfather John Richman Roberts both owned farms on the banks of the Current River. They watched their family heritage torn apart, burned down and destroyed at the hands of the very people that promised to preserve it and I can express the grief they still feel when we visit those areas. This is only the story of our family and I want to express there are hundreds of families who's heritage was destroyed and I am here today to speak for them as well. We have seen our rights deteriorate and stripped from us without reason and we fear more is about to come. Our hope is that our children, our grandchildren and our great grandchildren will be afforded the same pleasures we enjoy and the same rights we have had, giving the same opportunities to the next generation of the Roberts family. We live here and no one considers it more critical to be good stewards of the land than the residents who call this pristine location in the Ozarks home.

I believe the State of Missouri would be a better steward of the lands located within the boundaries of the Ozark National Scenic Riverway and have proven by the current outstanding park system within the state they we are capable of this undertaking.

I am proud to be here today in support of Representative Jason Smith's proposed bill to support The transfer of the Ozark National Scenic Riverway to the state of Missouri and I invite you to visit with us, get to know the people who truly intend to conserve, preserve and enjoy the recreation our area provides.